touched every American, indeed people around the world. Those who were most deeply affected, of course, were the family and friends of the victims, the students who were injured, the entire Virginia Tech community. Our hearts go out to them as we read each day in the papers across this country about young lives ended too soon. We mourn with the families and their friends and students at Virginia Tech. But the ripples of pain of this terrible incident reach far beyond Blacksburg, VA.

Among the others who care are the people of the Republic of South Korea, Korean Americans and Korean immigrants in our Nation. In Seoul, South Korea, more than 1,000 people gathered last week to sing hymns and pray for the victims. Closer to home in Chicago, in my State of Illinois, leaders of the Korean-American community held a candlelight vigil last Thursday at the headquarters of the Korean-American Association to express their condolences to the families of those who died. These vigils were everywhere—from Illinois to California to Korea. Around the world, sympathy and compassion was felt for the victims, their families, and Virginia Tech and its community.

In addition, a coalition of Korean-American organizations has joined together to form a foundation to assist the families and the Virginia Tech community in this time of healing. The Korean American Coalition, the Korean American League for Civic Action, the Korean American Students Conference, the Mirae Foundation, the Southern California Korean College Student Association, the Korean Academy for Educators, the Network of Korean American Leaders, and others have joined to create the Virginia Tech Memorial Fund to support those who have been affected by the recent tragedy. This is another example of the amazing compassion communities throughout our Nation and the world feel for these victims.

Sadly, some members of the Korean community have also shared feelings of guilt that they are somehow responsible simply because the Virginia Tech gunman, Seung Hui Cho, was Korean. Last week, South Korea's Ambassador to the United States, Lee Tae Sik, spoke at a candlelight vigil in Fairfax County, VA. Through tears, Ambassador Lee said that the Korean-American community needed to repent. He even went so far as to suggest that a fast by individuals in his community, 1 day for each of the victims of the Virginia Tech gunman, would prove that Koreans were ‘‘a worthwhile ethnic minority in America.’’

But Korean Americans do not need to apologize for the tragedy at Virginia Tech. To those members of the Korean-American community who have been so pained by this terrible tragedy, I repeat what one young woman said in the Washington Post Special Edition last week. She said:

> The actions of Seung Hui Cho are no more the fault of Korean Americans than the actions of the Washington area snipers were the fault of African Americans.

I agree with what she said. The actions of this 23-year-old young man is no more the fault of Korean Americans than the fault of every 23-year-old young man in our Nation. When will we move away from racial tensions that sometimes threaten to break apart our national community? We are all part of a greater community that feels tremendous sorrow and grief, as Americans and as human beings, no matter what our nationality may be.

If there are any glimmers of hope to come out of these horrible events at Virginia Tech, they are, first of all, the great courage, faith, and compassion demonstrated by these Hokies and the extended Virginia Tech family.

One other glimmer of hope is the fear many Korean Americans and Korean immigrants have expressed of being persecuted and blamed are not being realized. Rather than blaming a group of people, Americans of all ethnic backgrounds are showing a deeper understanding of what it means to be one community to mourn together, to work together so that this may never happen again.

One man was responsible for the tragedy at Virginia Tech, but we all share responsibility to do what we can to prevent such a horrific loss from ever occurring again.

STUDENT LOANS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, in April, students all across the Nation will make final decisions about where they want to go to college, and with college costs higher than ever, they are figuring out how they are going to pay for school. For most, the financial aid office at their chosen school is their only guide through the complex world of higher education funding.

Students are making financial decisions and choosing their colleges. They are making decisions, though, that will affect them for 20 or 30 years after they graduate. They are making these decisions based on what they believe to be impartial advice from their future school's financial aid officers. Unfortunately, we have learned over the last few weeks, the advice given to many may not have always been passed on with the student's best interest in mind.

Where is the student loan industry today? Here is where we are: Student loans are an $85 billion industry. Lenders have been clamoring to be placed on schools' preferred lenders' list. Financial aid officers of prominent schools have been placed on leave over allegations of holding significant financial interest in the parent company of a lender they have been recommending to students.

A top official at the Department of Education's Federal student aid office has been placed on leave after it was disclosed that he held a significant amount of stock in a parent company of a lender.

Let's go back in history for a moment to 1965, the year that Congress began guaranteeing loans to needy students and paying the interest while the student was in school. To entice the financial industry to loan money to students without a credit history, lenders were given a helping hand from the Government. Congress created the Federal family education loan program, the FFEL program, which subsidizes lenders and guarantees them against default. Congress also chartered the Government-sponsored entity then known as the Student Loan Marketing Association, euphemistically called Sallie Mae, to create a secondary market for lenders participating in the loan program. Sallie Mae would purchase loans from the lenders, thereby providing liquidity so that the FFEL lenders could continue loaning money to each new class of students.

Now fast-forward to 1994 when the Direct Loan Program went into effect and the Federal Government began loaning money directly to students. The General Accounting Office, the Congressional Budget Office, even President Bush found that the Direct Loan Program cost the Federal Government a lot less than the FFEL program. Using the President's numbers, for every $100 private lenders loaned to students in 2006, it cost the Federal Government $13.81 for the FFEL Government loans, while the same amount borrowed through the Direct Loan Program cost the Federal Government only $3.85—$13.81 for the private lenders, $3.85 per $100 for the direct loans.

For a few years, the Direct Loan Program grew quickly, capturing one-third of the student loan market. My predecessor in office, Senator Paul Simon of Illinois, was one of its strongest advocates. However, the private lenders weren't going to go down without a fight. They were making too much money on these students. They didn't want to lose this opportunity. They wanted this market to be there for years to come. College costs were on the rise, students needed to borrow more and more money, and private lenders saw potential profits in student debt. So they began to offer money to schools to pull out of the Direct Loan Program.

Even though the program cost the Federal Government less money, these private lenders went to the universities and said, well, why don't you just use our private lending operation. Don't go the direct loan route. Of course, they had a profit motive in doing that. They sued to prevent the Direct Loan Program from becoming more competitive. Their efforts paid off. The direct loan market is now down to less than a quarter of the student loan market. It is shrinking.

It is about this time that Sallie Mae, led by a man named Albert Lord, decided to become independent of the Federal Government so it could offer student loans, not just purchase loans on the secondary market. It successfully shed its GSE status in 1997 and now is one of the most dominant players in the student loan market in America. Its shareholders and executives have benefitted handsomely.

Let me show what has happened to the stock price of Sallie Mae, SLM if you are looking for a way to look it up on the Internet. Stock prices from 2001 to the present have appreciated 281 percent. This is the industry loaning money to our students around America. Doing quite well. Company revenues went from $3.5 billion in 2001 to $8.75 billion in 2006.

One would like to think these Federal subsidies would at least make college more affordable if we are putting this much money into this private corporation that is loaning money to students. Let's see what happened to college costs. Tuition, fees, and room and board at 4-year public schools have followed a similar trajectory, increasing by 42 percent since the year 2001.

The remarks I am going to make today have a lot to do with the people who are loaning money to students across America, how profitable it has become, how well they have done, and how poorly the students are doing. The debt is being heaped on them. They end up graduating from college, if they are lucky, with a debt as big as the mortgages most of us faced when we bought our first home. Now we say to these students: Congratulations, here is your diploma and your book to pay back your loan. Good luck in America.

I don't want to absolve the colleges and universities from this conversation. The fact is, they have been a party to the dramatic increase in the cost of higher education during this same period of time. We will save that topic, as important as it is, largely for another day.

Speaking to the student loan industry, with higher government subsidies and higher college costs, something is wrong with this picture. Remember Mr. Albert Lord I mentioned earlier, the former CEO and now chairman of the company called Sallie Mae? Mr. Lord has done pretty well loaning money to students across America, so well that he recently got into a little controversy in the Washington area. He proposed the construction of a golf course, and people in Anne Arundel County didn't like the idea much. They didn't want the traffic that might be associated with the golf course, so they started complaining. Mr. Lord, however, disabused them of the notion that this would cause traffic congestion when he told them that the 244 acres he was setting aside for the golf course was for his own personal and private golf course.

Doing quite well, isn't he, at the expense of students across America? He had enough personal wealth to lead a serious but unsuccessful bid to purchase the Washington Nationals baseball team. In 2002, Mr. Lord, appropriately named, was ranked first in the Washington Post's executive compensation survey of local companies, and Sallie Mae's current CEO, Thomas Fitzpatrick, was ranked second. What a terrific business it is loaning money to students struggling to get their education.

In 2004, Mr. Lord was ranked second on the list, with $41.8 million in total compensation. Not a bad year. Yes, Sallie Mae's executives have come quite far from the days when they worked as a quasi-governmental operation. Sallie Mae's dramatic financial growth didn't happen without some financial help. Since the start of the Bush administration, Federal officials have turned a blind eye to problems surrounding private lenders. And why wouldn't they? The Bush administration rewarded loan industry officials with key positions in the Department of Education.

There isn't anything inherently wrong having people with experience in the loan industry working in the Department of Education. What I am asking, though, is whether the cozy relationship that developed between the Bush administration, the Republican-led Congress, and the lenders have left the loan industry essentially unregulated.

If I was a lender who heard Representative BOEHNER, former chairman of the House Education Committee, say to the loan industry, ''know that I have all of you in my two trusted hands,'' what do you think I would do? Exactly what the lending industry has done—do whatever it takes to push the student loan industry in my favor—especially at a time when I knew no one would be there to stop me.

This is when revenue-sharing arrangements between colleges and lenders began. Sallie Mae led the way with one of the most offensive schemes called ''opportunity pools.'' Here is how it works. A lender provides a school with a fixed amount of private loan money the school can lend a student who otherwise wouldn't qualify for loans. These loans come at higher interest rates. In return, the college agrees to make the lender its exclusive provider of federally backed loans.

Some of Sallie Mae's competitors complained to the inspector general; however, Department officials chose not to take any action, insisting that the loan industry could regulate itself. What do you think Sallie Mae's competitors did with this tacit approval of opportunity pools? They did what any business would do to compete—they began offering similar deals to schools.

But they didn't stop at opportunity pools. Lenders have loaned financial aid offices staff and have operated call centers on behalf of schools. Students and their families seeking information and advice on tuition financing options are talking to individuals they believe to be school officials but are actually employees of the lenders. Lenders have long provided schools with little office trinkets, such as post-it pads and pens. No harm done. However, in recent years the little trinkets have turned into gifts, such as iPods and trips to exotic locations for so-called educational conferences.

Let me give you one example. Last year, EduCap, a nonprofit lender who offers loans under the name, Loan to Learn, invited financial aid officers and their spouses or guests from all across the Nation to an educational, all-expense paid ''summit'' held at the luxurious, beachfront Four Seasons Resort in Nevis in the West Indies.

This resort, by the way, has been rated as one of the top luxury resorts by Travel and Leisure magazine.

Between symposiums, forums, and roundtable discussions on the importance of addressing the cost of higher education, guests could enjoy snorkeling, water and beach sports, sailing, kayaking, volleyball, sailboarding, access to an 18-hole championship golf course, a 10-court tennis complex, beachfront pools, and a luxury spa. Not a bad deal for college officials being entertained by the student loan industry. News of the trip generated such negative response from the public that EduCap had to cancel it, unfortunately, before it occurred.

After reading about the West Indies trip, I asked the inspector general of the Department of Education to investigate whether lenders are offering kickbacks or inducements to school officials in return for loan business. My staff passed along information provided to us by constituents regarding these inducements. You can imagine my disappointment when a member of my staff received an e-mail response from the inspector general's office. The e-mail merely described the results of the inspector general's conversations with my constituents. My staff didn't think the e-mail could possibly be the inspector general's official response and followed up to confirm. Even with all the recent news stories, I am still waiting to hear from the inspector general of the Department of Education as to whether they are going to initiate an investigation into these lender inducements.

Sallie Mae recently agreed to be bought out and turned into a private company. Is this a good deal? Is it good for taxpayers that subsidize student loans? Is it good for students? It certainly is a good deal for Sallie Mae's executives and shareholders.

The buyers, two private investment funds, J.P. Morgan Chase and Bank of America, have agreed to pay $25 billion for this company at $60 a share for its stock. In case you are wondering how much that is over the stock price that is published, it is 50 percent, a 50-percent premium over Sallie Mae's share prices before news of the buyout was reported. Let's see how much Mr. Lord and Mr. Fitzpatrick are going to do if this deal goes through.

Well, it looks like Mr. Lord is going to end up with $47.2 million, and Mr. Fitzpatrick, a little better, with $58.6 million. They are riding high. They are riding high at the expense of students all across this country.

There was a time when this Congress cared enough about students in this country to create a program called the National Defense Education Act. It was a time when Sputnik had been launched. We were afraid of the Soviet Union and what it might do with its satellite capacity, and Congress, for the first time, said let's create a student loan program, the first time ever.

I know a little about this program because I happened to be one of the recipients, one of the borrowers. I borrowed money to go to college and law school from the National Defense Education Act and paid it back after graduation at 3 percent interest. I couldn't have asked for better treatment and better consideration from those who were lending money.

Those were the early days when we were just thinking about students and education and the future of America. Now we are talking about big business, fat profits, basically indefensible compensation for the CEOs who run these companies. I hope someone is able to uncover what other fees and payments Sallie Mae's executives may be receiving to help take the company private.

Will this deal be good for students? Sure, Sallie Mae and many other lenders have long touted that they have been able to offer better deals for students through loan fee and interest rate discounts. Of course, they can offer a discount. They are obviously still making enough money off student loans. Look at their profitability. Look at what has happened to their stock price. Look at how much they are being paid. Yet they made sure the Direct Loan Program, cheaper for the Federal Government, better for the students, could not compete.

Now we know why they have been able to make money off students. The Washington Post recently reported that some lending companies with access to the National Student Loan Data System, which includes confidential information on 60 million student loan borrowers, have repeatedly searched the database in ways that violate the Federal rules on privacy. It appears the lenders were giving unauthorized users, such as marketing firms, collection agencies, and loan brokerage firms, access to this database.

Lenders are allowed to access information contained in the database only if they have the permission of the student or have a financial relationship with the student, but the Department of Education recently decided to cut off outside access to the database. Were lenders using this information gathered from the database to sell other nonrelated loan products to students? We don't know for sure, but I intend to find out. I have sent letters to the largest student loan companies asking them to reveal how many times they have accessed the database in the last 4 years and explain what they subsequently did with the information.

I am concerned about the proposed sale of Sallie Mae. A private Sallie Mae could lead to even less information being disclosed to the public. Sure, lenders are required to provide certain information in order to participate in the Federal loan program, but we should make sure all lenders are held to the same standard of disclosure, regardless of whether the lender is a school or a nonprofit, a private or a publicly traded company.

Let me conclude by saying that tuition at 4-year public institutions has risen by 42 percent in the last 5 years. Students and their families are struggling to pay off college debt. Students are leaving college, on average, with nearly $20,000 in debt, and many much more. We must take serious steps to help these students achieve the American Dream.

On the Democratic side of the aisle we are proposing a $1,090 increase in the maximum Pell grant over 5 years, a cap on loan repayments at 15 percent of an individual's income, and reducing the student loan interest rate. How will we pay for it? By cutting $22.3 billion from the lenders' subsidies, which we give to those like Sallie Mae. Sure, it is more than President Bush's proposed cut, but only a little bit, $2.3 billion. Of course, lenders are claiming that the proposed cut goes beyond what they think is sustainable and that lenders will decide to leave the student loan business. It is difficult to be moved by these claims when a company like Sallie Mae is worth $25 billion and its buyers are willing to pay a 50-percent premium, knowing that the lenders' subsidies will likely be cut.

It is time we return to the day where the Federal Government makes a serious investment in one of its most valuable assets, its children. The future of our country depends on it. We need to be asking those who are involved in this business of student loans to keep in mind first these students and their families.

THE RETIREMENT OF JOHN C. HICKMAN, JR.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, one of the ways Congress maintains its contact with the American people is by the official report of the business we do. Through its recent modern history, we have published a CONGRESSIONAL RECORD so that people across this country, online and in printed form, can read the words of Senators and can follow the debate on the floor of the Senate. None of this effort would be productive or even possible were it not for those in the Office of the Official Reporters of Debates who come here and follow every word that is spoken on the floor. They make these publications possible.

Today, Jack Hickman, the Morning Business Clerk for the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, is marking the end of his service to the Senate. In the future he will be able to listen to Senators and not remember a word. But at this point in time he has dispatched his official duties.

I know I speak for the entire Senate family, thanking Jack Hickman for his service.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. NELSON of Florida). Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President. I want to explain why I missed two votes early during yesterday's session, Senator DEMINT's amendment No. 930 and Senator COBURN's amendment No. 918 on S. 761, America COMPETES Act, a bill that I cosponsored. I was confident that my vote would not change the outcome, and the DeMint amendment failed by a vote of 22 to 79 and the Coburn amendment failed by a vote of 27 to 67. If I had been able to come to the floor, I would have voted against both amendments, but the outcome would have been the same.

The reason I missed the votes was that I was attending a very special hearing in the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on mental health issues for our returning soldiers. The first panel included a recent Iraq veteran with PTSD, parents of an Iraq veteran who committed suicide after returning home, and parents of an Iraq veteran soldier who died of an overdose of his own prescription drugs while in VA care. One of the families had come from Iowa and the other from California to talk about the tragedy of each son's death and to seek ways to ensure that other families might avoid such tragedies. The Iraq veteran, a combat medic, spoke eloquently on his own problems acknowledging and treating his PTSD and the similar problems of fellow soldiers in his platoon.

One father testified that after his son died of an overdose in VA care, he and his wife went to claim his son's personal effects, and the items were handed to them in a plastic garbage bag. I was shocked and outraged. I knew that it would seem heartless to cut their panel short and not let these parents and this veteran share their full story so I volunteered to stay and listen so that the full story could be given in committee. These families already feel that parts of our Government do not care, and that is sad. I needed to stay to chair the hearing and let these courageous witnesses continue their testimony.

I am very glad I did. Despite the tragedy and grief these individuals face, they are speaking out boldly in hopes of changing the current system so other veterans and other families do